"What is the problem?   *Where* is the work? Getting to the bottom of social action"

Mark Addleson

School of Public Policy,

George Mason University

1. REPORT DATE **20 OCT 2010**	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED **00-00-2010 to 00-00-2010**

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
'What is the problem? Where is the work? Getting to the bottom of social action'		5b. GRANT NUMBER
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER
		5e. TASK NUMBER
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) **George Mason University,School of Public Policy,4400 University Dr,Fairfax,VA,22030**		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT **Approved for public release; distribution unlimited**

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES **Social Science Underpinnings of Complex Operations 18-21 October 2010; George Mason University, Arlington Campus. U.S. Government or Federal Rights License**

14. ABSTRACT

15. SUBJECT TERMS

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT **unclassified**	b. ABSTRACT **unclassified**	c. THIS PAGE **unclassified**	**Same as Report (SAR)**	**19**	

Organizing for action: It's *not* the structure

Achieving Representation

Military Victory Achieved — Conditions for Coexistence — Fewer incidents of violence — Conditions for Cooperation — Strategic Success

PHASE III ACTIVITY
CENTCOM JTF-Iraq
JTF Iraq
JTF-Iraq Civil Authority
Civil Authority

Ethnic — ★ STABILITY
★ HA
★ - STABILITY   ★ POLITICAL Implementation
★ - RESETTLEMENT
★ Joint Economic   ★ INTEGRATED ECONOMY
★ - IO/NGO INTEGRATION Ventures

Division of People — Tribal
AIMED PRESSURE TO ACHIEVE END-STATE OVER TIME
★ Internal Agencies   Tribal   Ethnic
★ Legal System   Religious

★ SECURITY
★ ELECTIONS   ★ Market Cross-walks   ★ JOINT ADMINISTRATION
★ JOINT MEETINGS   ★ Police Integration
★ MAYORS MTGs

Religious — ★ PRESENCE
JTF Iraq
JTF-Iraq Civil Authority
Civil Authority
PHASE III ACTIVITY
CENTCOM-JTF-Iraq

MILITARY LEAD   **CIVILIAN LEAD**

From: a US Central Command briefing from 'Military Victory to Strategic Success' in Iraq

Source: Thomas E. Ricks, 2006, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, New York, The Penguin Press

'What is the problem?' 'Where is the problem?'

To policy analysts, organization researchers, and others

What is the problem is meant as both question(s) and a statement

- **The questions:** What are the problems we're dealing with? What kinds of problems are these?
- **As a statement:** We're dealing with complex social environments, but, when it comes to getting things done, we're not looking at the real issues.

Social researchers, analysts, policy makers, and managers operate in a make-believe world and deal with imaginary problems.

Where is the problem:

The line I'm going to take is that *if we ask where the problems are* we'll come to see *what the problems are* – the kinds of issues we're dealing with and how to get to grips with them

Problems of the 'old' and 'new' professional

"The professional's job was once seen as solving an assortment of problems that *appeared to be definable, understandable, and consensual* [meaning there was consensus about what the problems were].

He [*sic*] was hired to eliminate those conditions that predominant opinion judged undesirable [i.e. to *solve* the problem]. His record has been quite spectacular of course….

　　　　But … we have been turning our attention to … [problems] that are much more stubborn….

… [Conventional] professionalized cognitive and occupational styles [approaches to and methods of research]…based on Newtonian mechanistic physics, are not readily adapted to contemporary conceptions of interacting open systems and to contemporary concerns with equity [rather than efficiency]."

Adapted from **Rittel, H and Webber, M. (1973), 'Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning'**, *Policy Sciences*, 4, 156.

What and Where is the Problem?

"With arrogant confidence, the early systems analysts pronounced themselves ready to take on anyone's perceived problem, diagnostically to discover its hidden character, and then, having exposed its true nature, skillfully to excise its root causes … By now we are all beginning to realize that one of the most intractable problems is that of defining problems (of knowing what distinguishes an observed condition from a desired condition) and of locating problems (finding where in the complex causal networks the trouble really lies)."

Rittel, H and Webber, M. (1973), "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning', *Policy Sciences*, 4,

Enlightenment thinking is coming apart

Via Emergence, complexity, chaos theory: The world is no clockwork. It is neither linear nor predictable

Via the interpretive tradition in philosophy: The world as we know it isn't 'out there'. People make meaning of circumstances and events – give meaning to the world ('social constructionism) – and what they do (their actions') reflects those meanings.

'Social problems' have to do with 'social action' and how *different* people make meaning. To understand the problems we have to understand how they see things and the connections between what they see and do.

When people *set problems* they organize

- "In real-world practice… problems do not present themselves to the practitioners as givens. ….[A] practitioner must … make sense of an uncertain situation that initially makes no sense. When professionals consider what road to build, for example, they deal usually with a complex and ill-defined situation in which geographic, topological, financial, economic, and political issues are all mixed up together….

- *It is this sort of situation that professionals are coming increasingly to see as central to their practice*. ….They are coming to recognize that … [their problems are not technical ones]."

- [T]hey set the problems. Problem setting is a process in which, interactively, we name the things to which we will attend and frame the context in which we will attend to them.

Adapted from Donald Schön (1983), *The Reflective Practitioner*, New York, Basic Books. p.40
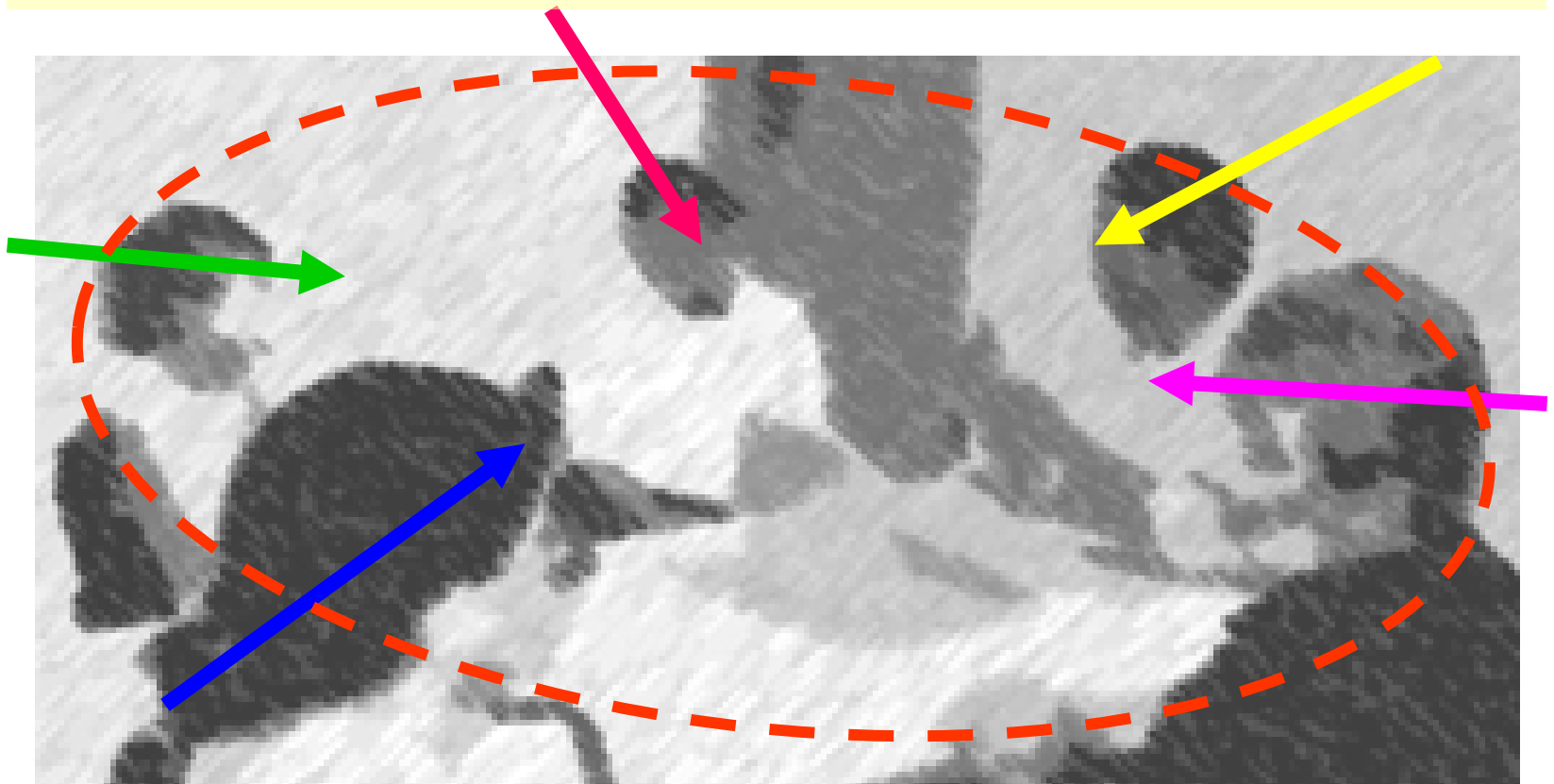
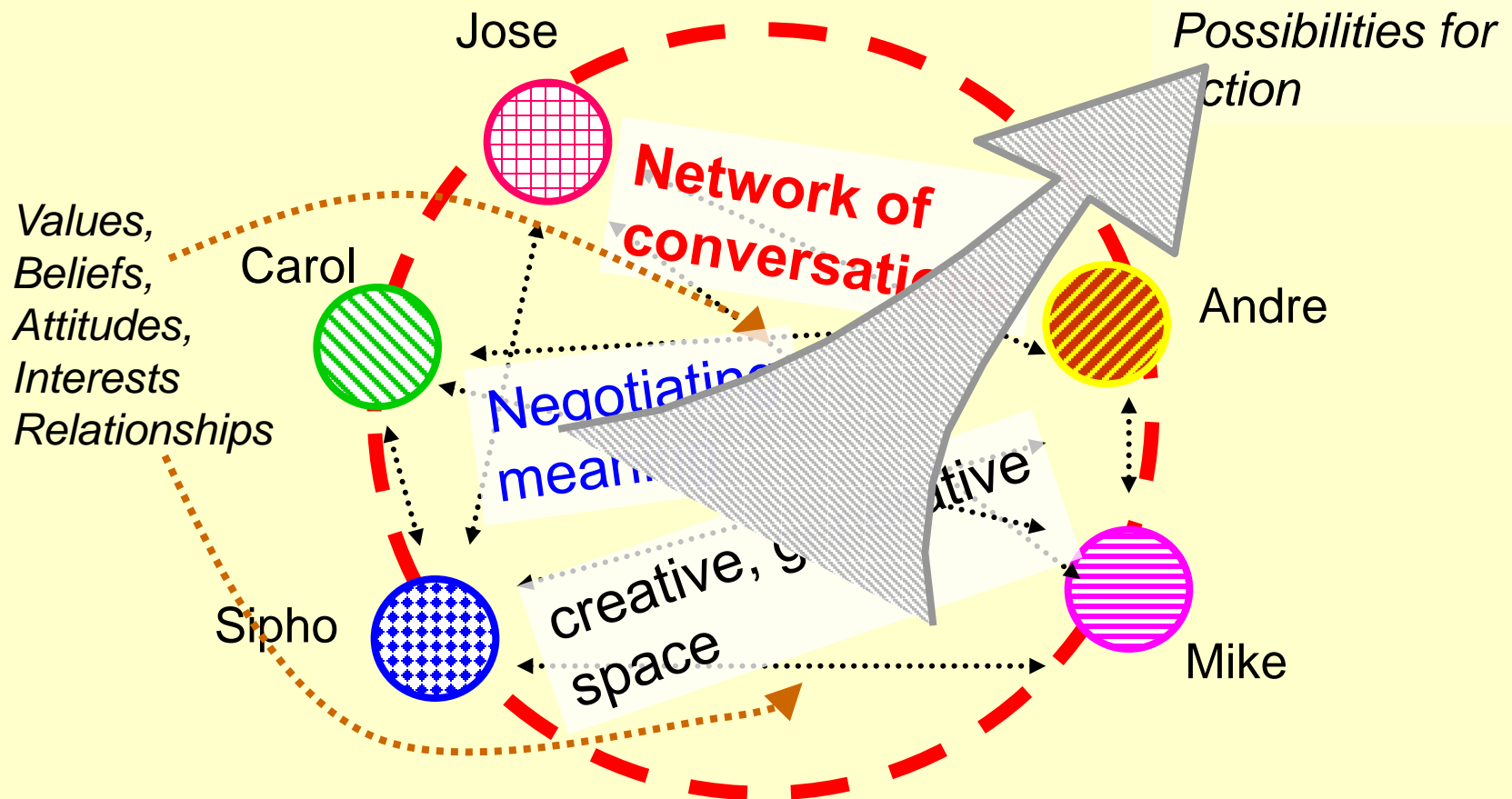Looking in on a group (i.e. 'stakeholders' or 'participants'), in conversation, 'setting their problems'

This is what I think….

I propose…

I'm not so sure ….

They're talking about what's going on, what to do…. Asking questions, making proposals, and taking decisions, they're sharing knowledge, negotiating meaning, *organizing*.

The idea of a social space

Together, they create a **social space** (equal emphasis on both words) that 'holds' them and their conversations, influences what they say and, ultimately, what they do

A *social* space: 'Inside' the work of organizing

Jose

Possibilities for action

Network of conversation

Values, Beliefs, Attitudes, Interests Relationships

Carol

Negotiating meaning

Andre

creative, generative space

Sipho

Mike

What's 'in' a social space?

A social space is 'shaped' – influenced – by

- Relationships
- Attitudes
- Beliefs
- Values
- Interests

Influencing, amongst other things, their commitment to the work and each other.

The boundaries in social spaces

There are invisible 'boundaries' in their social space that have to do with their relationships, attitudes, values, interests, beliefs…. (and their space is a potential boundary to 'outsiders' joining the conversation).

- Are they generous about sharing knowledge, open to learning and able to convince one another about how to proceed, so they move to action together, with a sense of a shared purpose and joint commitment?

- Or do they act without broad agreement and support, either because they're competitive, guarded, or distrustful, or because they just haven't had, or made, the time to find out what others think or expect?

This is what I think….

I propose…

Engaged?

Listening?

Aligned?
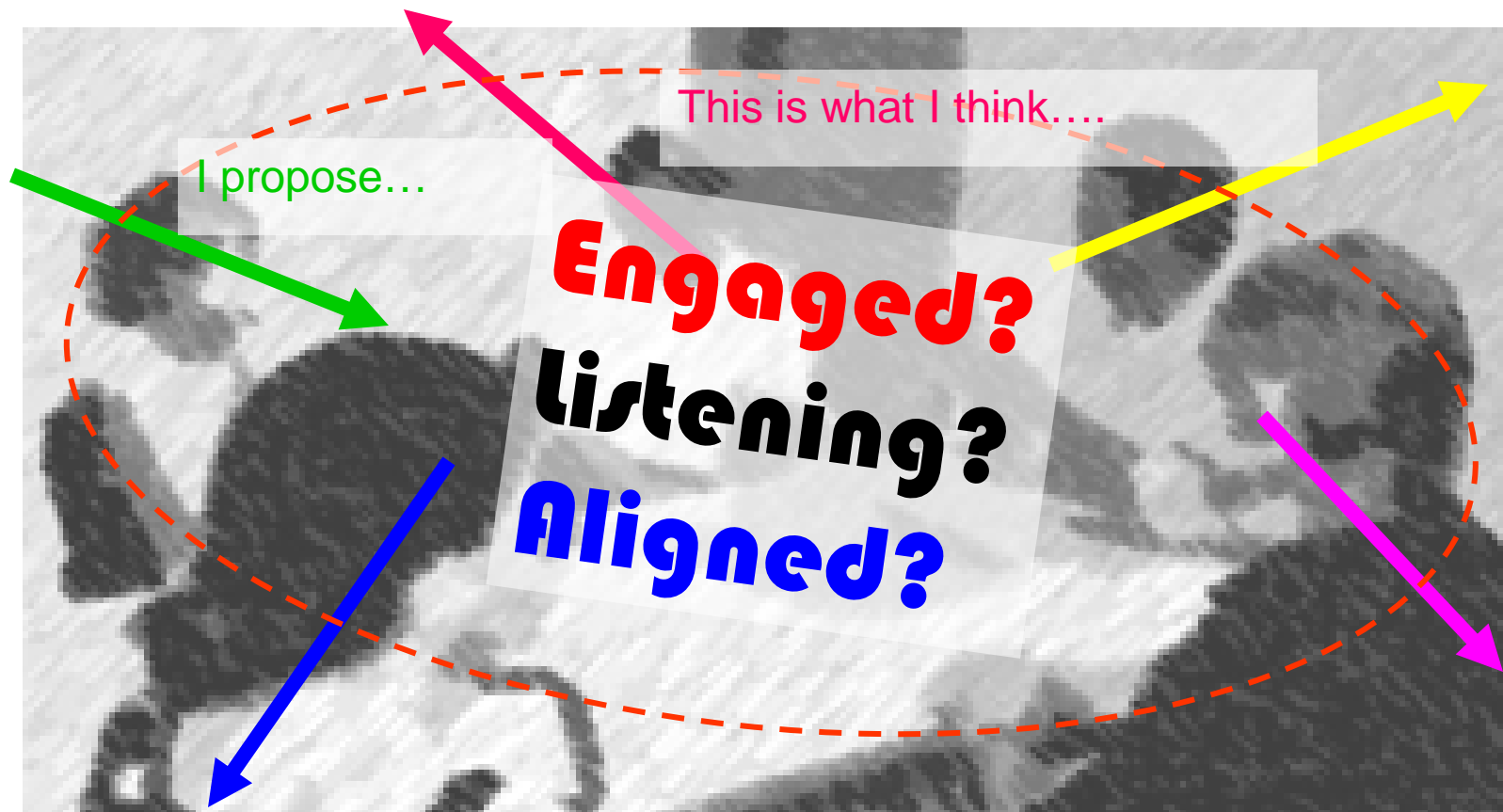
What is their social space going to 'look' like?
What are their relationships, interests, priorities?
What kinds of conversations will they have?

The work of organizing

To take action (get things done) they have to 'get organized'

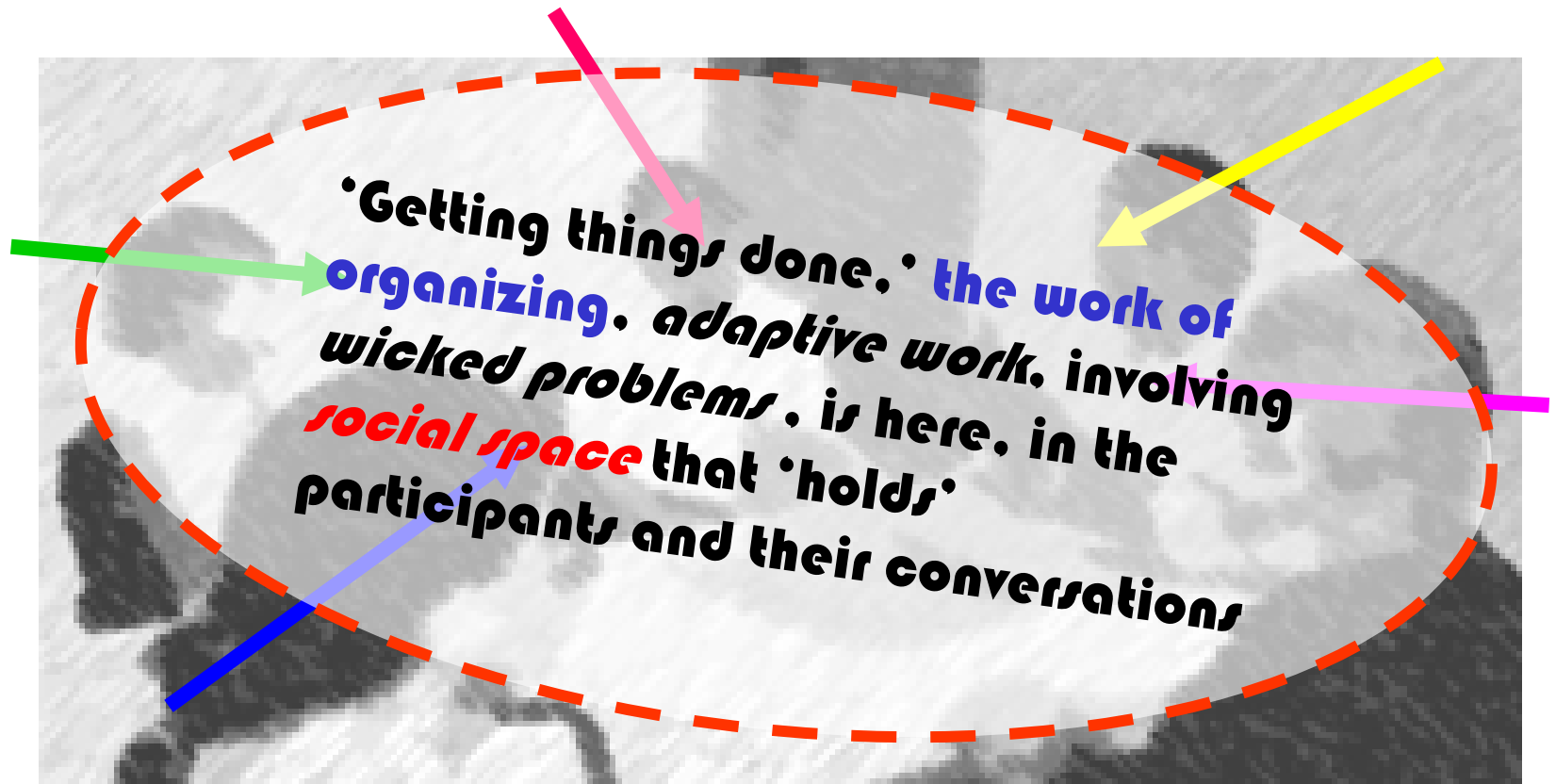Four interwoven threads to the work of organizing:
- Making meaning of the situation at hand
- Creating work (deciding what to do)
- Building networks and negotiating boundaries
- Aligning for action

This is a deeply social process

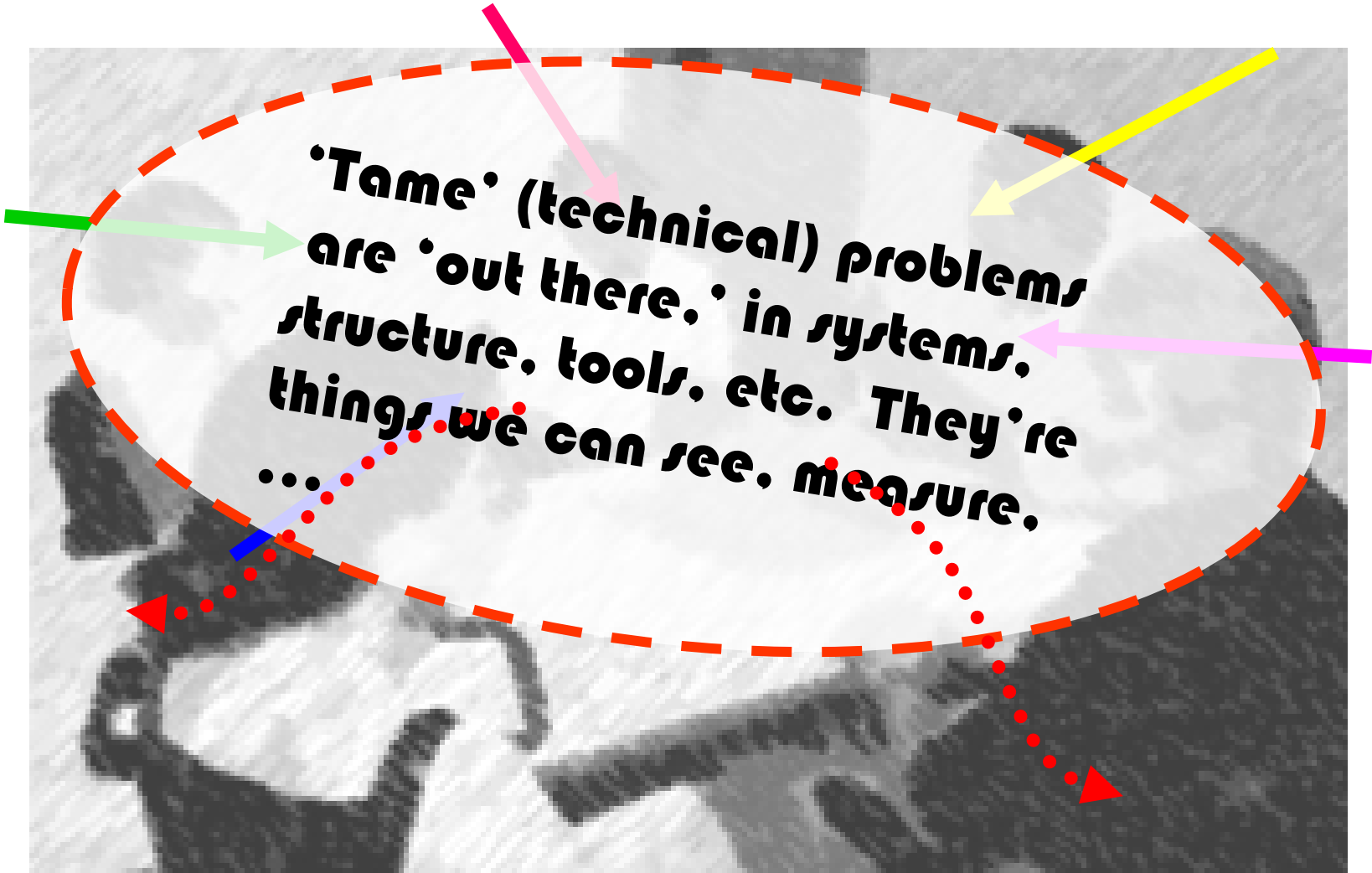It is what Ron Heiftez calls '*adaptive work*'. It is all about values, beliefs, attitudes, relationships, …

Have you done all this? Then you've 'set the problem' and are ready to tackle it

Where are the problems? In the '**space between**'

'Getting things done,' the work of organizing, adaptive work, involving wicked problems , is here, in the social space that 'holds' participants and their conversations

The problems *belong to the group*. They're **both created and resolved collectively**, in their interaction (meaning making), in the process of asking questions, making proposals, taking decisions.

'Tame' (technical) problems are 'out there,' in systems, structure, tools, etc. They're things we can see, measure, ...

Implications

To see the problems (what are the problems?)….

- We have to **get 'inside' the work**, where the action is, and make meaning of how others make meaning of what is going on and what they're doing.

- This is the **'view from practice'**, the view of a **participant**, where you're 'inside' the social spaces, 'in' the conversations..

- Most social research, in particular research using quantitative methods, is based on the 'view from the top'. A view from 'outside'. A view of structures, systems, rules, budgets….

Paying attention to the boundaries

No matter how stable or certain its boundaries… **a territory is never totally discrete but can be connected to any other – anything other**. A territory cannot be understood independently of other territories that it adjoins, only in connection with them. However, connection is not the simple interlocutor between separate territories, rather they are the "outline" of a third position, a position in and between; never fixed, always moving, always in the middle, always becoming one territory or another without ever achieving totality".

*Wood, M. (1999). "Cyborg: A Design for Life in the Borderlands." Emergence **1**(3): 92-104.*

'Get the beat'

Before you disturb the system in any way, watch how it behaves. If it's a social system, watch it work. *Learn its history. Ask people who've been around a long time to tell you what has happened*…..

Starting with the behavior of the system forces you to focus on facts, not theories. It keeps you from falling too quickly into your own beliefs or misconceptions, or those of others

Starting with the behavior of the system directs one's thoughts to dynamic, not static analysis – not only to "what's wrong?" but also to "how did we get there?" and "what behavior modes are possible?" and "if we don't change direction, where are we going to end up?"